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ABSTRACT

Although children's literature has emerged as a popular vehicle for fostering literacy development in elementary schools, few schools have a well-developed literature curriculum or have developed an articulated curriculum that differentiates between reading skills and literary understanding. To answer whether literature-based instruction means different things to different teachers, a study explored literature-based instruction in six schools that enrolled significant numbers of low-income students. District administrators were interviewed, as were 26 teachers. Twenty-eight other teachers agreed to both classroom-based interviews and classroom observation across the school year. Perhaps the most surprising finding was the lack of any substantial differences in the time allocated for reading and language arts instruction in schools with differing curriculum plans. Writing was not linked to reading, and students seemed to spend relatively little time composing. Although trade books were available, the range of complexity and genre was fairly restricted; most classrooms did not have an individual library. The most striking finding was the extent and breadth of change occurring in elementary schools, the literature-based curriculum being only a part of the larger movement. However, the most significant constraints to change were largely situated outside the classroom--in federal, state, and school-district offices. (Contains 52 references.) (TB)

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Patterns of Implementation of Literature-Based Curriculum

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Literature Teaching & Learning
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Patterns of Implementation of Literature-Based Curriculum

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There has been a recent rapid shift away from the skills-mastery models of reading and language arts curriculum in American elementary schools (Pearson, 1993). After nearly a quarter-century as the dominant curriculum model, skills-mastery approaches to reading and language arts instruction are being replaced with literature-based curriculum designs. However, little agreement exists, it seems, as to what constitutes a literature-based curriculum other than providing children with the opportunity to read original children's literature (Giddings, 1992).

Thus, it is not surprising to find a research literature on literature-based instruction that provides less than optimal information on the nature of such curriculum and the impact on student literacy development. We found, in our review of the available research, two distinct limitations. First, many reports document the changes that occur in a single classroom or school. While we located several multiple-classroom studies (e.g., Mervar & Hiebert, 1989; Morrow, 1992; Reutzel & Cooter, 1990; Scharer, 1992; Walmsley, Fielding, & Walp, 1991; Zarillo, 1989), we found none that reported a study of literature-based instruction in a number of classrooms in several elementary schools in multiple school districts. Second, little of the available research reports on literature-based instruction in schools serving large numbers of children from low-income families — historically, the children most often at risk of experiencing difficulty in learning to read and write.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LITERATURE-BASED INSTRUCTION

Probably the most compelling finding of several large-scale studies is the widespread implementation of literature-based instruction. The data from the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993) indicate that half of all fourth grade teachers report a "heavy emphasis" on literature-based reading. The NAEP data also show that the students of teachers reporting heavier emphases on literature-based reading instruction achieved higher levels of proficiency on the

assessments. Just over half of the fourth grade students reported that they were provided daily time to read a book of their choice. When these data are coupled with the teacher "read aloud" data provided by Hoffman and his colleagues (1993) in their 24-state survey of teachers indicating that three-quarters of all teachers responding read aloud to children from literature, and the data from Fractor and her colleagues (1993) indicating that almost 90 percent of the teachers studied had children's tradebook collections available in their classrooms, the case seems well made for the current popularity of literature-based approaches.

But then there are the five-state teacher survey data from Canney (1993), which indicate that 80 percent of the teachers responding reported using a basal anthology to teach reading (less than one-third reported their districts required basal use) and only 10 percent reported using tradebooks exclusively during reading and language arts lessons. Additionally, 80 percent of the respondents reported that they felt a "scope and sequence" of reading development was important. And closer inspection of the Fractor et al. (1993) data indicate that while virtually all teachers reported having tradebook collections, less than a third of the teachers had classroom library centers. Similarly, the Strickland et al. (1994) data from teachers interviewed in eight states indicate that 18 percent of the respondents used children's literature exclusively, while over 80 percent use both basals and books. Additionally, the Hoffman et al. (1993) data indicate that while most teachers do read aloud from literature, few select tradebooks linked to the curriculum under study and few follow the read-aloud event with any sort of student response activity. Thus, while it does seem that children's literature has made inroads in American classrooms, few teachers seem to actually use children's books in many of their lessons. Literature is more likely to be used in either read aloud events or independent reading activities than to be used as part of an instructional episode or integrated curriculum.

Nonetheless, there are indications that the very presence of literature in classrooms has altered some aspects of traditional reading and language arts lessons. First of all, most children, it seems, have the opportunity to choose the literature read for independent reading activities. Second, children are at least exposed to a variety of authors and classic stories during read aloud events. Third, as the basal anthologies have changed, children are gaining increased exposure to a wider variety of award-winning children's literature, though often the selections are excerpted from a longer work.

There are other shifts linked to the wider use of literature in elementary schools. Walmsley, Fielding, and Walp (1991) and Hiebert and Colt (1989) report that children read and wrote more in classrooms using literature. Fisher and Hiebert (1990) note that the talk in classrooms using literature was different than that in traditional skills-mastery

classrooms. Teachers and children talked with each other about what had been read or written, about content and their response to it, in classrooms using literature. In contrast, talk in the skills-mastery classrooms was more often procedural, direction giving, than focused on content or response to texts read or written.

But Walmsley and Walp (1989) also note some areas of concern. Few teachers in their study had begun to articulate a philosophy of literature instruction, even though many created a book-list curriculum. Few teachers had resolved the intended relationship between reading skills and literary strategies, between reading achievement and literary knowledge. Walmsley and Walp end their paper noting that "it appears that reading skills instruction is still the primary mission of the elementary school, and literature still is regarded as something to be done after the reading skills have been sufficiently developed" (p. 37). They also note that poorer readers rarely participated in the guided reading of full-length literature but that when they did participate the lessons were more slowly paced, offered more teacher direction, and focused more on literal understandings than lessons offered to better readers.

Fisher and Hiebert (1990) note an emphasis on narrative texts in literature-based classrooms with far less focus on informational texts and, relatedly, the limited linkage between the literature used in the reading and language arts periods and other subjects studied. Walmsley and Walp (1989) suggest that literature has been added to the school day but not yet integrated into the curriculum.

The final aspect of literature-based instruction that has been studied in several situations is the transitions that teachers must make in adding literature to the curriculum. There is some agreement concerning the limited awareness most teachers have of the substantial scope of children's literature. However, as Walmsley and Walp (1989) note, most of the teachers currently employed in schools were offered little preservice preparation in this area. Shanklin (1990) found that even after a three-year staff development project, a number of teachers found it difficult to select books of appropriate difficulty for their students. Some teachers relied almost exclusively on narrative texts and often failed to provide students with either strategy lessons or opportunities to talk about the books being read. Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) noted that for the successful acquisition of literacy in literature-based classrooms "self-directed cognitive activity seems to be one of the keys" (p. 27). In their study, some children did not easily engage in such activity, expecting, instead, knowledge to be delivered to them. But this should not be surprising. Children differ in their enthusiasm for literacy activities just as adults do (Solsken, 1993). Often, children of less well educated parents arrive at school with far fewer experiences with print, stories, and books and thus have developed few of the ways

of thinking about literate activity so valued in schools. These "inexperienced" children are often the children who fail to thrive in the schools we have (Allington, 1994a).

We also know that many, if not most, teachers find change difficult and anxiety producing. Scharer (1992) and Pace (1992), for instance, document the transitions that teachers attempted to make and how the organizational and social contexts of their schools fostered or impeded these transitions. It matters whether the change process is more generally self-initiated or part of a larger mandate from the institution. Pace found that substantial tensions existed between the teacher-initiators and other teachers and within initiators themselves when their innovations ran afoul with school mandates. Teachers responded to these tensions in different ways. Some returned to traditional teaching methods, others became isolated, and some made the transition successfully.

Likewise, Scharer found that collegial support was critical, as were opportunities develop necessary expertise (e.g., familiarity with children's literature). She noted steady but slowly changing classroom environments as teachers shifted their teaching practices, but these shifts were gradual. But shifts were often difficult for reasons other than lack of collegial support or limited expertise in needed areas. For instance, Walmsley, Fielding, and Walp (1991) and Afflerbach and Johnston (1992) note the difficulty teachers had applying traditional assessment strategies to literature lessons. As long as assessment practices (including report cards) remained unchanged, teachers literally felt compelled to maintain some of traditional activities that fit well with traditional grading schemes. As long as student development was assessed with high-stakes standardized tests, there remained a press to perpetuate traditional teaching practices that were thought to produce higher scores on those instruments.

There can be little argument that children's literature has emerged as a popular vehicle for fostering literacy development in our elementary schools. But it seems that few schools have well-developed literature curriculum, few have yet evolved different sorts of assessments of literacy development, few seem to have yet developed an articulated curriculum that differentiates between reading skill and literary understanding, and few teachers yet seem comfortable without some sort of commercial curriculum material as a framework for their instruction, perhaps because few teachers have been adequately prepared to create their own strategy lessons (Graves & Graves, 1994).

So, while the research points to an increasing use of children's literature in schools, the available studies also report a substantial variation in how literature is used. At least some of the variation observed seems to stem from the fact that "literature-based" instruction means different things to different people. One obvious question, then, is

whether there are patterns in this variation and whether such patterns are linked to different meanings of literature-based instruction.

STUDYING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LITERATURE-BASED INSTRUCTION

In an attempt to begin to answer this question, we set a broad exploration of literature-based literacy instruction as our task. The initial work involved locating potential sites and exploring the nature of literature-based curricula found in the schools.

Site Selection

We began by sending informational materials to 35 school districts that enrolled significant numbers of low-income students. We received inquiries about potential participation from 23 and then contacted each by telephone to obtain further information about the districts' elementary school reading/language arts programs. Site visits to 13 schools followed during which we gathered information on the school and its curricular plan for reading and language arts instruction. These districts were potential sites that met our primary criteria of (1) enrolling substantial numbers of low-income students, (2) implementing literature-based curricula, and (3) representing different community types.

As we examined the information from the prospective sites, it became apparent that school districts varied considerably in their interpretation of literature-based instruction. We found three broad categories of curricular plans. There were districts that were implementing a literature-based curriculum in which children's literature (tradebooks) was the central curriculum material. In these "books" districts, the curriculum plan usually centered on core books for each grade level and thematic units. In other districts, children's literature and a basal reader series occupied central roles. These "basals-and-books" districts differed in a number of ways, including the prominence given either component in the instructional plan and whether there was a mandate to use either or both. Still other districts were implementing a literature-based curriculum primarily through the adoption of a new literature-emphasis basal reader series. In these "basal" districts, the basal reader components, including student anthologies and classroom sets of children's books, represented the curriculum plan. While we found important variations among district plans in each category, our conversations with district administrators convinced us that each of these three organizing schemes represented a generally different plan for the implementation of literature-based instruction.

In the final selection of six schools we chose two schools that fell into each of the three broad categories of district curriculum plans. Two schools were urban schools in a city

school district. Three schools were located in small mill towns and one in a rural school district. None were located in a suburban setting.

In these schools, from 25 percent to 90 percent of the children qualified for free- or reduced-price lunches. Two schools enrolled primarily minority students.

District data collection

Prior to the beginning of the school year we contacted district administrators and arranged tape-recorded semi-structured interviews concerning curriculum. During these interview sessions we collected district curriculum documents when they were available. We also interviewed administrators during the year and met with district administrators to clarify issues that were raised in preliminary analyses at each site. The audiotape-recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis.

Teacher participation

In each school we met with the faculty to elicit teacher participation in the study. There were two levels of teacher participation—*interview* or *observation* teachers. Interview teachers (n = 26) agreed to extended classroom-based structured interviews over the course of the year. Observation teachers (n = 28) agreed to both classroom-based interviews and classroom observations across the school year. We developed these two levels of participation to broaden the pool of teachers we worked with. Many teachers who were uneasy about allowing observers to document the implementation of literature-based instruction were willing to participate in an extended structured interview in their classroom.

CLIPS

We extended and adapted the Classroom Literacy Instruction Profiling System (CLIPS). CLIPS is a four-page coding system that requires low-inference ratings of classroom environmental features (e.g., display of literature, size of classroom library, display of student work, organization of desks, etc.) and allows coding of responses to interview items (e.g., What types of materials are used in literacy instruction?). Approximately half of the items (n = 15) are forced-choice items with only a single coding allowed (e.g., teacher attitude toward the use of literature). The remaining items (n = 12) allow for multiple responses (e.g., activities regularly part of instructional time). The teacher interviews were conducted in their classrooms so to as allow the interviewer to gather environmental data on CLIPS and to allow responses to be probed for examples (e.g., samples of student work illustrating links between literature and composing or sample portfolio used in evaluation).

Three teachers were interviewed by different interviewers on two separate occasions with their responses coded onto the CLIPS along with the classroom environment ratings. Across the 27 CLIPS items there was a 91 percent agreement among the raters.

Classroom observations

We used a modified version of the Student Observation Instrument (SOI) to gather time by activity data from student instructional experiences in classrooms. The SOI contains structured coding categories describing the instructional setting within a time-recording scheme. In addition, the SOI allows the observer to take field notes during the instructional segments and record the curriculum materials in use (we also made photocopies of materials and student work completed during the observation). The structured coding categories provide a quantitative description of student activity, while the field notes and curriculum material documentation provide qualitative information for analysis.

The SOI was originally developed by researchers at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (Rowan et al., 1986) and has been used in previous studies (see Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989, for a more detailed description). We adapted several of the structured coding categories to better reflect the nature of the curriculum and academic work completed in the classrooms we observed (the original SOI was designed during an era in which the use of skill-oriented basal reader series dominated classroom reading-language arts instruction). Observers coded *lesson* (reading/language arts, science, math, etc.), *program* (regular education, remedial, special education), *grouping* (whole class, small group, individual), *format* (being read to, silent reading, shared reading, composing, discussion, recitation, etc.), *instructor* (classroom teacher, other teacher, paraprofessional, etc.), and *student choice* of reading matter and writing topic (free choice, limited choice, no choice). The SOI structured coding allows creation of a general map of child's instructional activity across a school day. We use these observational data to develop general descriptions of the curriculum as experienced by individual children.

The smallest unit of time for this coding was a single minute. These codes reflect general descriptions of classroom settings and tended not to shift rapidly back and forth. The field notes were written in the interim.

We piloted and refined our adaptations of the SOI and developed estimates of inter-rater agreement. Three senior researchers and two graduate research assistants collected data for the this study. The estimate of inter-rater agreement was 88 percent, established from an observation of a single classroom during the reading–language arts block.

Observational schedule

In each of the classrooms of teachers who agreed to be observed, we selected a child to follow across a whole school day on two different occasions (usually fall and spring semesters). We attempted to select students who were considered at-risk, although not necessarily exhibiting low achievement. Approximately half of the observed students (n = 27) were lower-achieving students, while the remaining students (n = 25) exhibited achievement at or above expected levels. We observed students who participated in remedial and special education programs (n = 22) and observed them during those classes when permission was granted. Gender of the observed students was nearly evenly split. Approximately one-quarter of the observed students were members of an ethnic minority group. Nearly two-thirds of the students were enrolled in the primary grades (K–3).

WHAT TEACHERS USE IN LITERATURE-BASED CLASSROOMS

After interviewing and observing teachers in these schools we found patterns of instruction that were related to the three different curriculum plans. For instance, in the two literature-based *basal* schools, virtually all of the teachers we studied reported normally using commercial basal anthologies in their daily lessons, compared to half of the teachers in the *basal-and-books* schools and only 10 percent of the teachers in the *books* schools.

All teachers in the books schools reported using children's tradebooks in their classrooms, but so did 80 percent of the teachers in basal-and-books and basal schools. We found some differences in children's opportunities to read complete tradebooks in these schools with children in the books schools, of course, spending more time reading complete full-length books than in the other curriculum schemes. However, reading children's books was a quite common experience for virtually all children in the schools studied. This finding seems remarkably similar to other recent large-scale studies, which have reported that nearly all elementary teachers now use tradebooks in their reading and language arts programs (Canney, 1993 ; Strickland, Walmsley, Bronk, & Weiss, 1994). In both studies, the basal-and-books curriculum plan dominated in popularity, with few teachers reporting use of either basals alone or books alone in their classrooms.

Time Scheduled for Reading and Language Arts

We found no substantial differences in the average amount of time allocated daily to reading and language arts instruction in these schools with different curriculum plans. At the same time, we did find a fair amount of variation among classrooms, a finding consistent with other large-scale studies of classroom instruction (Allington & McGill-

Franzen, 1989; Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Some classrooms allocated about one hour and others allocated nearly three hours each day to teaching reading and language arts. Across all classrooms in the six elementary schools we studied, students averaged 117 minutes of reading and language arts instruction daily, accounting for over a third of the school day.

This average time allocation is substantially larger than the average amount of time reported allocated in other studies of schools with many students from low-income families (Birman et al., 1987; Knapp, 1991), but is generally comparable to recent national reports of time allocations in American elementary schools (NCES, 1993). While comparable allocations of instructional time for reading and language arts may not be sufficient to accelerate the literacy development of the traditionally lower-achieving poor children in these schools, even time allocations that are comparable to those found in the average American elementary school represent an improvement over what was found in earlier studies (Birman et al., 1987).

Perhaps the most surprising finding here was the lack of any substantial differences in the time allocated for reading and language arts instruction in these schools with differing curriculum plans. This may have more to do with the problem of total time available being a relatively fixed feature of the school day. The two hours of daily time that were allocated for reading and language arts instruction in these schools represent over half the time allocated for all academic study. While the scheduled school day provides between five and five-and-a-half hours for instructional time, nearly an hour each day is allocated to areas such as art, music, physical education, computer labs, and library visits, and almost another hour is lost to organizational and transitional activities. Thus, the time allocations we found would seem to indicate a strong commitment to developing literacy proficiencies in students.

How Children Spend Time in Literature-Based Classrooms

While teachers in these schools offered roughly comparable amounts of reading instruction, there were differences in how that time was used. Three activities—teacher-guided reading, silent reading, and being read to by the teacher—dominated the lesson periods in all schools, but wide variations existed from classroom to classroom in the extent to which these activities were used. In addition, different activities dominated time depending on the curriculum plan in place at the school. For instance, teacher-guided reading, wherein teachers literally led reading and writing activities, was more common in basal schools than in books schools. It was in a basal-and-books school where silent reading was the dominant activity. It was in the books schools where reading to children,

conferencing with the teacher, and sharing a response to a book with other children were regular activities.

In our interviews with teachers, we found that those with books classrooms were more likely to provide students with daily opportunities to read independently (basal = 75 percent, basal-and-books = 80 percent, books = 85 percent), although most classroom teachers set aside time for children to read each day. All teachers in the books schools reported reading aloud to children regularly, while about three-quarters of the teachers in basal schools and basal-and-books schools said they did so. While precise comparisons are difficult, it seems that the children attending these schools had substantially more exposure to children's literature than was reported in studies conducted during the heyday of the skills-mastery curriculum plans (Allington, 1977; Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981).

However, children did not spend all their time reading in any of these classrooms. They spent more or less time engaged in seatwork activities depending upon the curriculum plan. In the basal schools, worksheet activities occupied larger amounts of children's time than did listening to the teacher read from children's books. Just the opposite was true of children in books schools. In the basal schools, worksheet activity accounted for between 15 and 25 minutes a day. In none of the other sites did students spend more than 10 minutes a day on worksheet activities. Compared to the results of earlier studies of classroom reading instruction, these time allocations suggest that there has been a substantial decrease in time spent on worksheet activity (Anderson, 1984; Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981).

During the interviews with teachers, we also found that while two-thirds indicated that the role of literature was to add enjoyment to the reading and language arts program, nearly 60 percent also indicated that the role of literature was to teach reading skills and to provide children with an opportunity to practice reading skills. Only about a third of the teachers reported that literature served to develop content knowledge or to develop writing skills of students. This may explain, in part, why on most observation days students spent relatively little time composing.

In only one of the books schools did composing rank among the most common reading and language arts tasks. Generally, students in all schools wrote briefly on some days but not at all on others. Roughly three of every four composing activities were allocated nine minutes or less, and half were allocated four minutes or less. The majority of the classrooms were rated as having very weak linkages between reading and writing activities, with no clear pattern between schools with different curriculum plans. Thus, while these different literature-based curriculum plans generally provided substantial

opportunities for children to read or listen to literature, rather few offered any sustained writing opportunities and few had integrated the reading and writing processes regardless of the curriculum plan in place.

We observed hardly any art or drama activities linked to the reading children were doing in any of the classrooms, but then fewer than 10 percent of all the teachers observed and interviewed indicated that such activities were regular features of any of the instruction they provided. Fewer than 20 percent of these teachers reported that they regularly incorporated oral response or sharing activities (e.g., author's chair) into the classroom activities. On the other hand, nearly half of the teachers indicated that vocabulary and comprehension worksheet and response journal activities were common activities, although such worksheets were least common in the books schools, where only about a third of the teachers used these materials.

In most classrooms, there were few extended periods for either reading or writing. Instead, the more common daily scheme produced a number of relatively brief reading and, to a lesser extent, writing episodes. Usually, classrooms seemed organized around 10–20 minute blocks of time, although many activities were much briefer.

Across all classrooms, it was teachers who overwhelmingly (82 percent) controlled the daily choice of available reading materials for guided reading activities. However, in three-quarters of the classrooms, students were allowed to choose the books they read independently. Nearly half of the teachers indicated that they planned for all children to read the same literature, while nearly a third indicated that literature was differentiated by children's reading ability. No teacher indicated differentiating literature by children's interests, although a few (15 percent) reported differentiation by individual needs. In these classrooms, then, we found literature selection to be largely adult-controlled regardless of the curricular organization.

Overall, we found few classrooms that fit Huck's (1992) description of the *comprehensive literature program*—classrooms where children more often chose which books to read, where discussion, drama, art, and writing dominated responses to the literature read. But creating such classrooms requires substantial shifts in perspectives on children and learning, as well as shifts in the curriculum.

What do Children Have Available to Read?

It would seem almost axiomatic that schools moving to literature-based instruction would need to ensure that all children have easy access to appropriate books. Thus, we also studied the availability of children's books in school and classroom libraries.

School Libraries

We found that children's access to library books varied as a result of the curriculum plan of the school. However, only two of the schools, both of which were basal-and-books schools, met the American Library Association's standards for the number of library books per child (approximately 20 volumes). Two of the school libraries, in one basal school and one books school, had only about half the number of recommended volumes per child.

Evaluating the adequacy of school libraries is a tricky business because there are important factors other than the sheer number of volumes available. For instance, different schools had different policies controlling children's access to the library, and different teachers had different patterns of book display and different procedures for student access to classroom libraries. By and large, though, children's access to the school library was restricted to a weekly visit. In only one school, a books-and-basal school, did children have regular library access outside scheduled weekly visits.

Earlier, we reported comparative data for the libraries in six elementary schools that generally enrolled economically advantaged children and the six schools we report on here (Guice et al., 1994). Our analyses indicated that in the schools serving more-advantaged children, the libraries contained roughly 50 percent more books than were found in the libraries of these schools that enroll many poor children. We noted a similar disparity in magazine subscriptions available in these schools. In other words, children from economically disadvantaged communities had a restricted selection of books and magazines available in their school libraries.

Classroom Libraries

Classroom libraries are another way in which schools might enhance children's access to books to read, especially if access to the school library is largely restricted to a single weekly visit. In tallying the size of classroom libraries, we found that these collections varied more by individual teacher than by curriculum plan, although on average the classroom libraries were smaller in the two basal schools and larger in the two books schools. However, the largest collections were located in classrooms where teachers reported purchasing most of the books themselves. Disturbingly, 40 percent of all teachers reported that their classroom libraries consisted primarily of books they had purchased themselves or acquired through book-club incentive programs; these teachers were found in schools using each of the curriculum plans.

Our counts revealed that roughly a third of the classroom libraries had fewer than 100 books, another third had between 100 and 200 books, and another third had over 200 titles, with a few collections having more than 500 books. But examining just the number

of books available in classroom collections can be misleading. Classroom collections also differed in the variety of books available, with some collections having multiple copies of a few books (often whole class sets) and others having one or two copies of 100 or more books. There was a particular problem in the basal schools and in "core book list" classrooms in books schools, where the classroom libraries often consisted of multiple copies of a few titles that largely comprised the curriculum plan. Throughout the school year, individual tradebooks from the collection were to be read by all students, with the reading of the titles restricted to the schedule established in the teacher's resource book accompanying the anthology-based curriculum or the teacher's lesson plans. These collections were less like classroom libraries and more like curriculum collections.

We found that most classroom collections of tradebooks offered a fairly restricted range of selections in terms of both genre and complexity. Most collections were dominated by modern narrative fiction, with far fewer titles representing other genres. Often the classroom tradebook collections had rather few "easy" books, instead offering mostly books considered to be of appropriate complexity for the grade level. This, of course, often meant that children experiencing difficulty acquiring literacy had access to the fewest appropriate books in most classrooms.

In only a few classrooms did we locate classroom libraries that met the adequacy standards set by Fractor et al. (1993). But even in some of these classrooms the collections contained few books that most at-risk children could read independently. Generally, classrooms had some children's books available, but often these titles were not well displayed nor organized in any particular fashion. Most classrooms did not have a reading area or library corner set aside. Most did not have special seating in the book area or special decorations marking that area as a library.

In summary, we found that only a few classrooms had what we felt was an adequate supply of children's books available. The problem seemed especially acute in primary-grade classrooms where we observed teachers using photocopied versions of children's books. While there were funds for photocopying, there were none to purchase books! In addition, children experiencing delays in developing literacy proficiency were the children least likely to have access to books of appropriate difficulty. Most often, classroom collections simply contained few books that such children could read independently.

Teachers and Children's Literature

During our interviews with the teachers, we discussed their familiarity with children's books and developed an estimate of each teacher's familiarity with children's books. Few

teachers in any of the schools exhibited what we considered to be extensive knowledge of children's books. Most teachers knew a few books quite well, but most were unable to engage in extended discussions of children's books generally. However, *none* of these schools offered any sort of professional development opportunities focused on familiarizing teachers with children's books. No school had developed any formal mechanism for introducing teachers to new books available in the school library or for enhancing the awareness of recently published children's books. Even so, 9 of 10 teachers across all schools reported positive attitudes toward the use of literature in the reading and language arts program.

Unfortunately, a favorable attitude is simply not enough. These schools were implementing literature-based instruction without working to enhance teachers' knowledge of the rich supply of children's books that might be used. Thus, teachers often opted for commercial collections of books, sets of books organized and leveled by outside experts. In some cases, the teachers opted for commercial collections that included teaching guides and student practice materials (e.g., chapter questions and vocabulary worksheets). However, without a good working knowledge of children's literature that is regularly updated, it is difficult to maintain a responsive literature-based curriculum plan.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

As we have just reported, we found that the three different school plans for literature-based curriculum had different effects on the opportunities children had to experience full-length children's literature and on the type of instructional activities they were likely to be engaged in. However, in each of these schools substantial blocks of time were allocated to listening to literature read by the teacher and for reading independently. Rather little time was spent on traditional seatwork activities in any of these schools. All this suggests that an instructional day in all of these classrooms looked quite different from the way it looked just a few short years ago (Allington, 1977; Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley, 1981).

The good news reinforced by these data is that more children seem to be doing more reading and writing and less isolated skill work than was the case just a decade ago. We found, for instance, hardly a classroom where full-length children's literature was not part of the curriculum plan, and there were only a few classrooms where children were not expected to compose something at least once each week. But many readers will be disappointed, we suppose, in the data we report here. While our study suggests that literacy instruction in American elementary school classrooms is changing, the change is likely to be viewed as too little and too slowly arriving for many.

But we found many forces that seemed to constrain school and teacher change in these schools and, we expect, most other schools as well. Unfortunately, these constraining forces have been little discussed in the research on literacy instruction, perhaps because so much of the research is largely decontextualized—decontextualized in the sense that classroom-based research rarely extends beyond the classroom walls. We found the most significant constraints to change were largely situated outside the classroom—in federal, state, and school-district offices.

Institutional Constraints

Educational reform generally, and implementing literature-based instruction specifically, requires an enormous amount of institutional and individual learning. Institutional learning involves developing more appropriate organizational plans for attempting an equitable distribution of resources, for creating curriculum, and for supporting professional staff. In the schools we observed, we concluded that teachers were often expected to change even though the institutions—the schools, the school districts, the state and federal education agencies—often resisted change. In too many cases, it seemed that the lack of institutional learning and the slow pace of institutional change was inhibiting the possibilities that teachers would or could change.

In all schools, teachers were expected to make substantial changes in the organization and delivery of instruction, but usually without any substantial support from federal, state, or district offices. For instance, in many cases professional development opportunities were available on a voluntary (unpaid) basis, but it was only some of the basal teachers who had the benefit of substantial (30 hours) paid training in the initial year of implementation. We are not sure that 30 hours (or 50, or 100) is an essential minimum. However, given the paid retraining provided by industry when major reorganizations take place (Shanker, 1994), this would seem a very modest amount and it was offered in only a single district.

Our experience with other schools suggests that this situation is common. No state or federal education agency has provided any substantial fiscal support for the individual learning that must occur if schools are to change. While President Clinton has called for businesses and corporations to invest 1.5 percent of their annual budgets in upgrading their workforces (1992), there have been but few calls for such investments to enhance the professional development of classroom teachers, the mainstay of the educational workforce.

In many cases, individual learning had substantially outstripped institutional learning in these schools. That is, teachers were ready to implement changes that were

unacceptable to the institutional forces that constrained teachers' decision making. Teachers wanted, as we have noted, to order more books for their classrooms, but the district budget allocated substantial funds only for photocopying. Thus, teachers purchased single copies of books and photocopied these for reading material. Teachers were ready to rethink traditional remedial and special education services but were unable to effect many of the desired changes because either the district administrators were unwilling to revamp these programs or state education agency directives constrained even considering such options (Allington, 1994c).

In most classrooms, we found few extended periods of time allocated for sustained reading or writing activities. Instead, the more common daily schemes produced a number of relatively brief reading and writing episodes. But many children in these schools participated in instructional support programs funded by state and federal agencies. These support programs regularly interrupted the classroom activities and contributed to some of the frequent activity shifting we observed. More often than not, the various special programs, usually state or federal initiatives, interfered with the organization and delivery of classroom lessons. In addition, state-mandated special subjects such as physical education, art, and music were interjected into the daily schedule seemingly at random. As a result of institutional mandates, classroom teachers had few extended and uninterrupted blocks of time in which they could schedule extended reading and writing activities.

There are abundant similar examples of institutional developmental delay that we could discuss. However, it seems important to point out that teachers not only bear the brunt of effort in the accomplished changes, but also that teachers were often frustrated in their efforts to change practice by institutional resistance or late developing institutional changes.

The Press for Standardization of School Experiences

In each school, we found substantial pressures supporting a relatively standardized school experience for children. This is another little discussed feature of schooling, but the press for standardization in these schools seemed to be a major barrier to implementing either teacher- or child-centered curricular approaches. In none of these schools were teachers given the authority to actually create their own curriculum. In each district, we found a strong interest in establishing curriculum standards that could create some sort of comparability between different classrooms at the same grade level.

In all of these schools, there existed multiple views about how to organize instruction, how to design the curriculum, and what roles children's literature should play. There were

differences among key administrators in each district, although these differences varied in degree between sites. There were differences among teachers in the same schools, though again these differences varied in degree. In three of the schools, the nature of the curriculum and classroom organization were more often decided by district administrators. In the other three schools, teachers seemed more influential in shaping these decisions, which were then supported by district administrators. Regardless of who seemed more influential on these issues, in each school only some of the professional staff was wholly supportive of decisions made about curriculum and instructional organization.

In each school, some sort of curricular compromise was expected from teachers. Compromise was expected when district administrators mandated a single basal series and set a curricular pacing schedule for teachers. Compromise was expected in the other basal school, where a majority, but not all of the teachers had elected a basal plan and the particular series used. We also found compromise expected in books and basal-and-books schools, where teachers created core-book lists and thematic units for each grade level that "protected" certain titles from all but designated teachers and where teachers were expected to use the themes and the core books as their curriculum.

We also found a press for standardization that came from administrators, from school boards, and from parents. As one school board member remarked, "What is so hard about figuring out what book second graders will be reading on any given day?" Thus, while teachers were often attempting to respond to children's interests and needs, they continued to feel pressure to standardize lessons and book lists from child to child and from classroom to classroom. After the prominent recent discussions of the debilitating effects of tracking and grouping children by achievement, teachers, administrators, and members of the community seemed concerned that all children receive similar treatment—which often meant reading the same books.

This press for standardization would seem an important influence in terms of the ability of teachers to respond to individual children's interests and needs. It represents an example of Fraatz's (1987) paradox of collective instruction. The paradox is that classrooms represent collective social enterprises in which teachers must constantly consider what is in the best interest of the collective whole. At the same time, teachers recognize that children differ and must attempt to address those differences in a nondiscriminatory way. The dilemma for teachers, administrators, and communities is how to provide instruction that offers similar opportunity for everyone, thus exhibiting nondiscrimination, while also responding to individual preferences and needs. Historically, equity has often been defined as some sort of uniformity (same state curriculum, same number of school days, same outcome standards, etc.), and in these

schools the press for standardization influenced how literature-based curricula were conceived and delivered.

Unlike most other industrialized nations, in the United States it is the state or local board of education that is ultimately empowered to make most curricular decisions (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). That is, decisions about what to teach, how to teach it, and what materials are to be used are left to school boards—that group of citizens elected by the community to oversee the schools.

In the schools we studied, there were differences in how willingly these boards approved decisions made by administrators or teachers. Some boards seemed to routinely approve such recommendations without much comment or discussion, while other boards requested much more detail and substantially greater documentation for such decisions. Such differences also shaped the nature of literature-based curriculum in these schools.

The Influence of Professional Conversation Groups

In those schools where we saw changes occurring most readily, we saw teachers supporting each other and administrators supporting teachers. Peer support seems absolutely critical because teaching, like learning, is a collective social activity (Scharer, 1992). Too often in these schools, though, teaching remained an individual activity, and schools had few structures available to support collaboration and conversation among teachers.

We noted that teachers involved in professional conversation groups found change less threatening and more attainable. These conversation groups were located in every school, but in some schools only a very few teachers participated. These were not institutionally sanctioned groups and, in fact, they were more likely to be "underground" groups that masked their very presence. Such supportive discussions were marked by private, professional conversations, usually held in classrooms at the end of the school day. There was no schedule, no calendar of topics, no leader, no support for these events. But the teachers involved told us that it was these conversations that provided the support, incentive, and shared wisdom that was needed to sustain change efforts.

Addressing Increasing Diversity in Student Achievement

In each of the schools the diversity of students in classrooms was increasing as a result of wide-ranging educational reform initiatives developed from afar. All of the school districts had recently eliminated transitional-grade (e.g., pre–first grade) primary classrooms. Thus, first-grade teachers now had larger numbers of children who had been historically considered unready for first-grade work. In each of the schools there was administrative press for reducing retention in grade. All schools were becoming more

"inclusive," with more extensive mainstreaming of handicapped children. Each of these initiatives seemed designed to better respond to the needs of children at-risk, and each could be well supported by available research. However, each initiative also increased the range of student diversity that teachers faced in their classrooms. Unfortunately, the federal, state, and school-district offices provided little in the way of professional development opportunities to support teachers in dealing with this increased diversity.

At the same time, in each school, we found an administrative press to move away from more homogeneous achievement grouping of students during reading and language arts lessons. The teachers in these schools were, then, confronted with a more diverse student population, usually with an increase in the numbers of lower-achieving students, and a press to use a single, standard curriculum with all children. This was to be accomplished without much professional development support in classrooms with few books generally and with very few books appropriate for lower-achieving students. Given these circumstances, we found it surprising that such an overwhelming majority of the teachers responded positively to literature-based curriculum plans.

Unfortunately, standard lessons do not usually exhibit an equally supportive impact on the literacy development of children with a wide range of achievement—regardless of whether the curriculum is literature-based or not. The teachers in these schools struggled with the difficulty of providing appropriate instruction for their students, especially the lowest-achieving ones. Too often, though, we observed classrooms where some students were never presented with texts they could read, with or without support. The traditional nature of most instructional support programs (e.g., remedial reading, resource room, paraprofessionals) did not often offer solutions to the classroom dilemmas that lower-achieving students encountered.

The most effective strategies we observed for dealing with such problems were for classroom teachers to (1) ignore the mandates for a common curriculum for all students, (2) purchase appropriate alternative curriculum materials (tradebooks) themselves, and (3) attempt to co-opt the instructional support program personnel into assisting with providing adapted instruction. Once again, teachers worked around the institutional constraints. Once again, teacher learning and change were simply out in front of institutional learning and change.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

At the heart of these findings is our realization of the enormity of the task confronting educators if we hope to accomplish the changes that have been called for in our elementary schools. We began this study expecting simply to look at the implementation of different

approaches to literature-based reading and language arts curriculum and were stunned when we finally realized this was but a small piece of a wide-ranging transformation of elementary schools that was underway. In retrospect, it seems we should have been able to discern the larger issues before we started, but we did not. It is simply the case that implementing a literature-based curriculum is but one component of the effort to literally reformulate elementary schools.

But studying even the implementation of literature-based curriculum is a messy affair, especially if our inquiry leads us beyond the classroom in an attempt to explore the forces that foster or impede change. We noted that different curriculum plans resulted in different patterns of curriculum experiences for children, even though we observed wide variation in practices in classrooms in the same schools. This variation points to the problem of attempting to define the "average" literature-based classroom. But perhaps it is time to move beyond such attempts and begin, instead, to attempt to better understand why comprehensive literature programs (Huck, 1992) seem so difficult to create in the schools we have.

The classrooms we observed have changed and are, in fact, continuing to change (we are continuing to observe and interview these teachers and administrators). The teachers in these classrooms are being called upon to learn new ways of teaching, new ways of organizing and evaluating instruction, and new ways of looking at curriculum, children, and learning. In most cases, these teachers are inadequately supported in this learning. In most cases, teachers are bearing the burden of the efforts to change while all around them pressures exist that subvert change.

We spent a year and a half listening to and observing teachers in the process of changing the way they teach reading and language arts. Each of these teachers could document and detail changes they had made in their teaching. Yet there is a real impatience evident in the literature, lectures, and legislation concerning the schools we have and the schools we need. The "thoughtful schools" that have been called for (Brown, 1991) will not emerge in full bloom overnight, though that often seems the desired end. Change is incremental, and even with support and nurturing change will take time (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Often, change has no constituency because it is simply easier to maintain the status quo. In contrast, there seems to be an emerging consensus about the need for change in literacy instruction offered in our elementary school, but as of yet there is no clear consensus on the nature of the changes that are needed nor any clear plan on how to best facilitate the change. Thus, change proceeds—but neither neatly or easily—with retaining

the status quo always a potentially attractive option to at least some of the constituents involved.

We have a wealth of opinion that elementary schools, generally, must change to meet the changing demands of American society. Many have argued that our elementary schools are not producing "thoughtful" readers and writers (see, e.g., Langer, 1990; Ravitch, 1985), but that criticism of our schools has a long tradition. Others argue that our schools work better for some children (usually children of the middle class) than others (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Levin, 1987), but that too is a long-standing grievance. There is no shortage of those who would reform our schools in one way or another, and because of the central role elementary schools have in developing literacy, most of the reformers would change the way literacy lessons are taught.

We, too, believe that elementary schools must change and that they must become places where thoughtful learning predominates, where *all* children learn to read and write alongside their peers, and where books are central to literacy learning and writing assumes a natural role as part of that learning. As a research team, however, we are a divergent lot and as such have no grand scheme for how precisely schools might best undertake the changes that are viewed as necessary. Instead, we set as our task to try to better understand how schools are changing and what literacy lessons look like in schools implementing literature-based approaches and serving large numbers of children from poor families. At this time we are continuing to interview and observe—in order, we hope, to be better able to describe both the effects of different curriculum plans and the nature of effective literature-based instruction. But it is time-consuming work—work not well-suited for the impatient reformer.

Still, we would urge readers to view our findings as reflecting half-full glasses, not half-empty ones. One common feature in these schools implementing literature-based instruction was teacher change. While we were able to document the influences that different curriculum plans had on children's experiences, we also heard teachers describe the changes in their instruction and classroom organization. As we have noted, change is difficult; the status quo is always safer and easier than changing. Our deepest concerns are that the changes underway may be stymied or may stagnate if the pattern of minimal support for teacher learning is not soon altered, and that children who are experiencing difficulty will not be well served without some fundamental rethinking of curricular and instructional support.

There needs to be a reemphasis on supporting the professional development of classroom teachers if the implementation of literature-based instruction is to provide the basis for a new, thoughtful literacy in our schools. Effective schools are but collections

of effective classrooms (Allington & Cunningham, 1995). Until classroom teachers become the focus of improvement efforts, change will proceed only ever so slowly.

We noted the seemingly critical role that involvement in a professional group played for the teachers we studied. We have attempted to devise ways to support such conversations and to expand the membership in such groups. To date, unfortunately, we cannot report any substantial successes in this regard. While organizing focus groups, forming teachers-as-readers groups, and attempting on-line network communications all seemed to have potential, none of these efforts have been sustained after our initial efforts. Still, the professional conversations still go on between some teachers in all of the school sites. Deducing how such activity might be expanded and the precise roles such conversations play in teacher professional development seems an important goal.

At the same time, the changes we documented across programs seem to represent real improvements in the literacy lessons that children experience daily in these schools. The implementation of literature-based curriculum plans seems to have increased the opportunities that children—especially children from low-income families—have to actually read in school, and seems also to have enhanced the access they have to full-length children's literature. These are positive steps, but for continued progress, the larger institutional players must become more supportive.

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